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ABSTRACT

In order to evaluate parents' attitudes toward their children's economic futures and to find out how attitudes might differ because of the sex of the child, a survey was conducted in the Twin Cities (Minnesota) metropolitan area. The survey consisted of 405 telephone interviews with parents of children between the ages of 10 and 19, divided equally into four groups: fathers referring to sons, fathers referring to daughters, mothers referring to sons, and mothers referring to daughters. The results suggest that parents' sex, children's sex, and parents' education are the strongest predictors of parents' attitudes toward sex roles and expectations of their children. Both mothers and fathers of girls tended to take somewhat stereotyped views of their children's educational needs, personality development, and future occupations. Their responses suggested a stronger orientation toward family life for girls, as opposed to a greater emphasis on jobs for personal happiness. Fathers of daughters had the lowest level of occupation expectations for their children among all the parent groups. Mothers of daughters were relatively more supportive of expanded work opportunities for women than fathers of daughters were. Mothers talking about sons stood out as the group with the highest expectations of their children and the most traditional views of male and female roles. (Seven tables of data are included, and 24 references are appended.) (ARH)

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PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ECONOMIC FUTURES OF THEIR DAUGHTERS

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ABSTRACT:

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ECONOMIC FUTURES OF THEIR DAUGHTERS

A study of parents' attitudes toward today's teenagers was commissioned for a conference on "The Economic Future of Girls and Young Women," in May 1984. The objectives were to evaluate parents' attitudes toward their children's economic futures, to find out how attitudes might differ by sex of child, and to provide pioneering information and insights as a springboard to further research, since there is little previous work on this topic.

The parents' survey consisted of 405 telephone interviews with parents of children between the ages of 10 and 19, divided into four groups:

1. Fathers referring to sons (101 respondents)
2. Fathers referring to daughters (101 respondents)
3. Mothers referring to sons (101 respondents)
4. Mothers referring to daughters (102 respondents)

Both mothers and fathers of girls tended to take somewhat stereotyped views of their children's educational needs, personality development, and future occupations. Their responses suggested a stronger orientation toward family life for girls, as opposed to a greater emphasis on jobs for personal happiness. Fathers of daughters had the lowest level of occupation expectations for their children, among all the parent groups. Mothers of daughters were relatively more supportive of expanded work opportunities for women than fathers of daughters were. Mothers talking about sons stood out as the group with the highest expectations of their children and the most traditional views of male and female roles.

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ECONOMIC FUTURES OF THEIR DAUGHTERS

One of the most significant developments in this century has been the revolution in attitudes toward the role of women in society, which has vastly increased awareness of the need for women to have training for paid employment.

Economic realities dictate the need for women to be prepared for this eventuality, regardless of their attitudes toward paid employment. Among factors contributing to an increased number of women in the paid labor force are marriage at later ages, smaller families, increasing divorce and remarriage rates, longer lifespans, and changing economic conditions. These factors have led to an increased need for women to be concerned about financial support of their children and themselves, including preparation for retirement (Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs, 1984).

The one-parent family headed by a woman is the fastest growing type of family in the U. S. today (Humphrey Institute, 1984). These families are highly likely to have poverty-level incomes, and they account for a sizable proportion of families living in poverty (Minnesota Commission on the Economic Status of Women, 1984).

Yet, women who choose paid employment for personal satisfaction, or for financial need, or both, face social barriers. The gap between what women earn and what men earn is well known. Women tend to be concentrated in traditionally "feminine" occupations, which tend to be under-paid and under-valued. Insufficient career counseling and lack of training in advanced mathematics and science continue to inhibit the movement of women into most male-dominated, high-paying occupations.

The purpose of this report is to examine the attitudes of parents as a primary means of socialization of female children into the role of worker, as well as the roles of wife and mother.

Despite the importance of parents' attitudes in this regard, little is known about their influence. Often, studies that touch on this topic involve small convenience samples, rather than random samples, and frequently they concern college students or middle-class families (much more available to academic researchers than other groups) rather than a cross-section of the population (e.g., Barnett, 1981; McBroom, 1981; Stockard, 1980).

Relevant studies offer the following generalizations: first, parents' attitudes on educational aspirations and sex roles are much more likely to be salient for adolescents than friends' attitudes on these topics are[1] (Davies and Kandel, 1981; Tomeh, 1984).

Second, parents' attitudes often differ according to their children's sex (Hoffman, 1977; Barnett, 1981; Brooks-Gunn, 1986; Anderson, 1980). Mothers' attitudes appear to have been studied much more often than fathers' attitudes. Anderson (1980) found that not only were mothers' educational expectations of their daughters lower than those of the fathers, but also mothers' expectations of sons were higher than fathers' expectations. Further, parents' educational expectations, especially mothers' expectations, are closely linked to children's own goals (Anderson, 1980; Doyle, 1984).

Third, parents' self-perceptions are frequently transmitted to their offspring (Baruch, 1976), and mothers' self-concepts often are highly related to employment status (Rollins and White, 1982). Research often indicates that homemakers have lower self-esteem (Stokes and Payton, 1986). However, homemakers may be more satisfied with their lives than working women are (Stokes and Payton), although results of some other research did not support this finding (Ferree, 1976; Allen-Kee, 1980).

Lower satisfaction of working women was explained in one study in terms of "relative deprivation," a theory which argues that women who worked outside the home raised their goals and expectations as a result of their employment

and compared their lot to men, finding it wanting (Stokes and Payton, 1986). Their higher goals were more difficult for them to achieve, in comparison to homemakers' goals.

Mothers' employment influences daughters' attitudes toward life goals, career preparation, and sex roles (Banducci, 1967; Marini, 1978; Nagley, 1971; Rollins and White, 1982). This is because homemakers tend to have more stereotyped, or traditional, attitudes toward women's roles (Bartos, 1982; Stokes and Payton, 1986).

Some research suggests that daughters who have a warm and affectionate relationship with their fathers are more likely to choose traditional lifestyles. In contrast, daughters from families with lower socioeconomic status who have poor relationships with their fathers may be more likely to reject traditional attitudes toward women (McBroom, 1981; Stockard, 1980). This apparently does not apply to mothers' attitudes (McBroom). However, daughters who perceive greater similarity between themselves and their fathers or who have a greater cognitive identification with fathers tend to have more liberalized attitudes. These results suggest a distinction between concepts of "sex-role identification" and "parental identification" (Stockard, 1980).

Fifth, socioeconomic status of parents is a powerful determinant of parents' and children's attitudes toward sex roles, career goals, and educational expectations. For example, Davies and Kandel (1981) concluded: "Socioeconomic status is the strongest determinant of parents' aspirations for their children, stronger than the adolescent's school performance" (p. 374).

When two indicators of socioeconomic status are compared, parents' income may not be related to children's educational goals as strongly as parents' education is (Anderson, 1980). Education and parents' gender may interact in different ways. Anderson found that mothers' education was a greater influence on daughters' goals and fathers' education was a greater influence

on sons' goals. Since women tend to be relatively less educated than men, this relationship tends to reinforce attitudes that perpetuate female inequality.

In explaining the relationship between social class and attitudes toward children's sex roles and occupational goals, McBroom (1981) points to considerable sex segregation in lower-class families, which tends to inhibit female children's job-training and education. In addition, these families tend to have more children and less access to childcare outside the home, which further restricts wives' movement into the labor force.

Higher socioeconomic status is linked to having more liberal, or non-traditional, attitudes toward women's roles (Stockard, 1980). This may stem partly from greater exposure to formal education and a broader range of ideas, greater access to childcare, and exposure to middle-class norms of independent thinking, creativity, and personal freedom.

Further, women who are homemakers tend to be less educated than women who are employed outside the home (Bartos, 1982; Besharov and Dally, 1986); therefore, differences between housewives' attitudes and career women's attitudes are based partly in social class differences.

THE RESEARCH

This paper reports results of a survey of parents' attitudes toward their children's educational and occupational goals, commissioned for a conference as a companion study to a survey of teenagers' attitudes in mid-March 1984. MORI Research, Inc., conducted this survey in the seven-county Twin Cities greater metropolitan area.[2]

The main research questions were:

1. What are parents' attitudes toward today's teenager with regard to schooling, personality development, and educational/occupational goals?

2. Do these attitudes differ according to sex of child, sex of parent, or parents' educational, occupational, or other characteristics?

Method

A sample of 405 parents with children between the ages of 10 and 19 was selected from a list of telephone numbers generated by a random digit computer program. They were interviewed by telephone in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area during April 4-17, 1984, and parents' responses were compared with those of a random sample of 207 adults in the general population in the same geographic area, interviewed at the same time. Up to four attempts were made to reach respondents determined to be eligible for the survey (approximately one in every six adults fell into the appropriate category). Results reported here are for the parents' sample only, since the general population sample's responses did not differ significantly from the parents.

Parents were interviewed about their oldest child between the ages of 10 and 19. Parents were eligible if their children included stepchildren or foster children, or if their children did not live with them. Interviews lasted an average of 15 minutes. Quotas were maintained in order to represent four parent-child groups equally:

1. Mothers, talking about daughters (102 respondents interviewed).
2. Mothers, discussing sons (101 respondents).
3. Fathers, referring to daughters (101 respondents).
4. Fathers, speaking about sons (101 respondents).

The response rate was 36% of completed contacts with eligible individuals, a below-average response rate for several reasons. First, many persons became suspicious when asked if they had any children because they feared that someone who might burglarize their homes was trying to find out if people were home or how many people were home.

Second, "children" is a sensitive, personal subject, which the interviewing firm compared to the subject of finances and banking--another topic area in which low response rates are typical. Third, parents who have children between 10 and 19 often are living through a period of turbulent

years for families. They may find the subject of their children painful or discouraging. Some respondents told interviewers that their children were no good and wouldn't amount to anything. However, once respondents were engaged in interviews, they tended to stay with the questioning to the end.

The two groups of fathers (those talking about sons and those talking about daughters) tended overall to be more educated than the two groups of mothers. They were also twice as likely to be in high-status white-collar jobs and one-third as likely to be in sales or clerical jobs. More fathers than mothers were employed in blue collar/service occupations.

The men in the father-son group were better educated and more likely to have high-status white collar jobs than the men in the father-daughter group. Incomes differed little between the two groups of men. Mothers who were interviewed about daughters had somewhat lower levels of education and slightly lower incomes than mothers interviewed about sons. Mothers who discussed daughters were slightly more likely to be in sales/clerical occupations and somewhat less likely to be homemakers, in comparison to the mother-son group.

Otherwise, the four parent-child groups were relatively similar in age, household size, political views, proportion which lived with both parents while growing up, and amount of contact with teens and pre-teens in their work. Fathers were a little more likely than mothers to have had a mother who worked outside the home at any time while they were growing up.

RESULTS

Parents were asked about attitudes toward expanded roles for women, ratings of job, scholastic, and personality characteristics for their children, and their predictions of their children's future occupations and financial well-being. The following section will compare the four parent

groups, provide insights into attitudes provided by responses to predictions of children's futures, and describe the best predictors of parents' attitudes.

1. Fathers Referring to Sons

Compared to other parents, this group overall showed lower support for expanded roles of women outside the family, although a majority of these men were favorable overall toward increased opportunities for women outside the home. (In general, the majority of parents were supportive of expanded women's roles.)

They tended to stress importance of advanced math, public speaking, science, and business for sons, among school subjects evaluated (Table 1). They also emphasized the importance of being aggressive and competitive as personal characteristics for boys (Table 2). Their evaluations of the importance of job characteristics were on a par with those of parents in general, with the exception of lack of stress in jobs and lack of danger of physical injury, which they emphasized less than other parents (Table 2).

More parents in this group than others selected family life over work satisfaction for their children when asked to choose between the two (Table 3). (The majority of parents overall emphasized importance of family life over importance of work satisfaction. Although they were quite likely to say that young people can no longer take for granted that they'll be able to live better than their parents, as most parents were, they were the most likely to say that their own children will be better off financially than they are now.

2. Fathers Referring to Daughters

Compared with fathers of sons, fathers of daughters tended to have slightly higher levels of support for expanded roles for women. On the other hand, they were less likely than other parents to consider advanced math, public speaking, basic and advanced science, courses to learn an occupation or

trade, and business as highly important school subjects for their children. They tended to rank the following atributes somewhat lower for their children than other parents: being independent, being informed, having a sense of accomplishment from work, doing important work, and being able to handle stress.

Fathers of daughters were less likely than other parents to say that high income and no danger of being fired are important for their children. Fathers of girls tended more than other parents to choose finding the right spouse over getting the right job for children's financial security (a majority of all parents chose jobs over spouses -- Table 3). In addition, this group was much less likely than any other group to say their children will be better off financially than they are now.

3. Mothers Referring to Sons

Mothers of sons were much like fathers of sons in their attitudes toward women's roles; that is, they were a little more likely to take a traditional view. Mothers of sons also were very similar to fathers of sons in their emphasis on school subjects which are more traditionally "male": advanced math, civics, the sciences, and job training. In contrast to fathers of sons, however, mothers of boys also placed relatively higher value on typing and family life/parenting. In this respect, they were more like mothers of daughters.

The mother/son group was among the most likely to stress being well-informed, deriving a sense of accomplishment from work, having low job stress, and being competitive, as well as work characteristics such as high income and low danger of being fired. Mothers discussing sons emphasized being aggressive less than fathers discussing sons, and these mothers emphasized paying attention to appearance more than the fathers discussing sons. Mothers describing sons tended to emphasize importance of work over importance of family for their sons' future happiness and financial security.

4. Mothers Referring to Daughters

Mothers who talked about daughters tended to be very supportive of expanded work opportunities for women; however, they were also the most likely to agree that it's more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself and to agree that too much is expected of women these days.

They tended especially to value typing for their children and to de-emphasize mathematics and science. They placed relatively higher importance on having a pleasant personality and paying attention to appearance and gave relatively low attention to being independent and competitive. These mothers were among those more likely to rate high income, no danger of being fired, and low danger of injury as being very important.

Mothers discussing girls were especially likely to stress importance of family life in future happiness, as opposed to importance of work satisfaction. These parents were especially likely to agree that upward mobility for young people will be less easy to achieve, and they were only moderately likely to predict that their daughters could look forward to more secure financial futures than they.

Parents' Predictions of Children's Future Occupations

Answers to the questions dealing with predictions of future jobs provided some of the most striking insights into the parents' attitudes. Parents were asked: "Just your best guess--what job or career do you think your son/daughter will have during the greater part of his/her working life?"[3] The majority of those who could answer this question (75% of parents) named well-paid white collar professions. The majority of those predicting such occupations selected professional/technical jobs (64% of parents making predictions) much more often than managerial (7%) or sales (3%) jobs. Six

percent of parents able to suggest an occupation listed clerical jobs, 17% mentioned blue collar/service employment, less than 1% said farmers, and 3% said homemakers.

The higher the parent's education and income, the more likely the parent was to say the child would be in high status white collar positions. Fewer single parents predicted these kinds of jobs for their children, compared to married parents. This suggests that the socioeconomic status of single parents tends to lock their children into a syndrome of poverty, or at least, it decreases children's opportunity to advance themselves.

Fathers were somewhat more likely than mothers to have no idea of their children's future occupations. This suggests that mothers have given that topic more thought.

The majority of parents who named a future occupation for their children said that if their children ended up having that job or career, they would be very happy (79% of those who named occupations, or 62% of the total sample). Nineteen percent of parents suggesting future jobs said they would be somewhat happy, and 3% said they would not be very happy.

Mothers talking about sons expressed the highest levels of pleasure about their predictions of children's choices (87%). This group also seemed to have the highest levels of aspirations for these children. The group with the next highest level of satisfaction with children's job paths was the father-daughter group, which is surprising at first, since fathers appeared to have the lowest level of aspirations for these children's futures.

However, this finding is not necessarily inconsistent with having relatively low levels of aspiration for daughters. If fathers have relatively low expectations, they may be easily pleased with daughters' future plans. It was the father-son group which indicated the lowest level of happiness, though this level was still high (69%). This suggests that fathers may have

relatively high hopes for sons and therefore may be more easily disappointed if their sons do not achieve high enough goals. A larger proportion of the mother-daughter group (76%) had a high level of happiness with these predictions, and it is possible that these mothers were also more easily pleased with daughters' plans because expectations of daughters were low.

Parents were then asked if they would consider the predicted children's occupations as better than their own, about the same, or worse. Half the parents who made predictions said these jobs would be better than theirs. The lower the parents' socioeconomic status, the greater their tendency to say their children would have better work than they.

Among the four parent-child groups, the mother-son group was most likely to say the jobs would be superior to theirs (61%). The same-sex pairs were about equally likely to give this answer (51% and 52%). Fathers talking about daughters were least likely to say this (35%).

Three of the parent-child groups reported that their children's future jobs and theirs would be equivalent, at about the same levels, ranging from 42% to 45%. However, only 37% of the mother-son group gave this answer.

More fathers discussing daughters (20%) than fathers discussing sons (8%) said that their children's jobs would be worse than theirs. Just 5% of the mother-daughter group and only 1% of the mother-son group indicated that their children's jobs would be inferior to theirs.

After parents made these comparisons, they were asked: "Why do you feel that way?" Parents who predicted that their children would have better jobs than they tended to mention the benefits of more education and better skills, which would lead to more opportunity for advancement, better working conditions, or higher prestige. Here are some examples:

- A mother said her son might be a pipe-fitter: "I just work in a factory on an assembly line. I think there is more status in having a trade."

- A secretary said her daughter would be a lawyer and a supreme court judge: "She'd get more education. It would be a great accomplishment for the females."

- A father who is a traffic and transportation clerk said his daughter would be in office management: "I am working in an office as just a clerk, not a manager. I'd like to have her lead other people."

- A male metal etching worker, who said his son would be a computer programmer, said: "I have a job that doesn't require any special skills -- a dime-a-dozen job that anyone can do. My son will have special training for his job and the kind of work he wants to do."

- A mother said that her daughter's occupation as a homemaker will be better because: "I am a homemaker, too, but I didn't finish school." Her more-educated daughter "will have more knowledge about bills, etc."

Other reasons included having better pay and more career options:

- A female factory worker said that her daughter would be a nurse and get "better pay, a career -- not just a job."

- A homemaker who hopes that her son will be a photographer: "I'm a female and didn't have the opportunities that he has."

- A machinist said that his son's future in agriculture would be preferable because "if he ends up doing something he enjoys, that would be better because I'm not happy with my job."

Most of the parents who expected their children's jobs to be about the same as their cited similarity of occupation, training, status, and responsibility (25% of responses). Comments include these:

- A father: "I'm a machinist myself, and he wants to follow me. I didn't push him into it, but he wants to be like me."

- A father who expects his daughter to be in the sciences or engineering "because I'm an engineer."

Ten percent of parents commented that the child's expected job was different from the parent's, but each has characteristics making them equivalent. Two percent mentioned other criteria.

A small minority of parents said that their children's job choices would be worse than their own. Some comments:

- A mother who works as an accounting clerk disapproved of her daughter's plan to be a factory worker "because I feel that she is smart enough to go on to school and do something more."

- A civil engineer wished that his son would not go into food or lodging services as his son then planned because "there's too many workers of that nature, and it's only a semi-skilled type of field."

Employed women and homemakers did not differ as to average age of child discussed or and status of predicted occupation, but they did vary according to comparisons of predicted job choices with their own occupations, as well as reasons for their answers (Table 4). Among mothers who said their children's future jobs would be better than their own, women working for pay tended to emphasize greater financial benefits more frequently than homemakers did. Homemakers tended to mention better education /training/prestige, fulfillment, and increased options more frequently than women working for pay did.

Among women who said their child's selection would be about the same as theirs, employed women more frequently emphasized similar training, education, or skills. Homemakers more frequently emphasized that the child's choice was different but equally fulfilling.

Very few mothers, regardless of employment status, said their children's jobs would be worse than theirs, and their reasons for this view varied little by employment status.

Many women in the sample described their jobs, paid or not, with the terms "only a . . ." or "just a . . ." Some examples are: "only a little job," "just a housewife," "not all-important," "not a real job." Many of their answers revealed a sense of low self-esteem and belief that women could not achieve as much as men.

Most of the homemakers in the sample indicated strong feelings about this role, either positive or negative. Some samples of their statements when they compared their children's jobs to theirs are:

- "Being a homemaker is a full-time job. It's more important than working, unless you have to work. You can get the same satisfaction from your family."

- "It all depends on what you consider better. I'm a homemaker, and I consider that a fulfilling job."

- "I'm just in a traditional role (housewife), and my son will have better choices for his career than I had for mine."

- "I don't have a job outside the home. The fact my child will have a good career would make her better off than I am."

A small number of housewives answered the question, "Would you consider that job or career (child's predicted choice) a better job than the one you have, about the same, or worse?" in terms of their husband's occupations, not their own. This suggested that their identity is so strongly fused with that of their husbands that they could not hear this question correctly.

Best Predictors of Parents' Attitudes

Three characteristics stand out from the rest as predictors of parents' attitudes toward children's educational needs, future roles as adults, and occupations: sex of parent, sex of child, and level of parent's education. Education and sex of parent are related, also, since the mothers in the sample tended to be less educated than the fathers. Mothers' tendencies toward more sterotyped views of sex roles are likely to be related more to level of education than to their sex. (Table 5 shows parents' education levels.)

This is most evident when mothers are divided into two groups, women who are employed outside the home, who tended to be more educated, and homemakers, who tended to be less educated (Table 5). The more education that women in the sample had, the more likely they were to be in paid employment. Higher education accounts in part for differences in attitudes between women in the labor force and homemakers (Table 6).

Table 7 compares some parents' attitudes, controlling for sex and education, and shows that parents with college degrees or more education were more likely to say that higher math is quite important for their children, compared with parents who have less education. Well-educated women tended more than men with the same amount of schooling to stress this subject.

Similarly, college-educated parents, especially mothers, highly valued advanced science.

Less educated parents emphasized the importance of being aggressive and learning a trade more frequently than more educated parents. The attitudes of parents with lower levels of education do not necessarily imply lower goals for children as much as they may reflect parents' assessments of what is realistic to expect for their offspring.

Table 7 also illustrates a sex difference for both attributes. More men than women rated being aggressive as important, but more women than men said that being well-informed was important. Women tended more than men to underscore the importance of job training.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study support previous research showing parents' sex, children's sex, and parents' education among the strongest predictors of parents' attitudes toward sex roles and expectations of their children. Parents surveyed represented a cross-section of the population.

Parents' attitudes contribute to the plethora of barriers women continue to face in providing for their own and their children's financial needs. Stereotyped views can be as harmful to males as to females.

Compared to parents of boys, parents of girls took a more restricted, traditional view of their children's needs with regard to schooling, personality development, and job attributes. Their responses suggested that parents had a stronger orientation toward family life for girls, as opposed to emphasis on jobs for personal happiness. Fathers of daughters had the lowest level of expectations of their children, among all the parent groups. Mothers of daughters were relatively more supportive of expanded work opportunities for women than fathers of daughters were.

Both mothers and fathers of sons had higher aspirations and broader views of boys' requirements for education, work, and personal development. These parents' responses conformed more to stereotyped views of male roles. Mothers of sons stood out as the group with the highest expectations of their children and the most traditional views of male and female roles.

Even though some results revealed a great deal of stereotyping in parents' views, other results suggest that there has been much change in parents' attitudes toward expanded opportunities for females in the last decade or two, compared to earlier research -- at least, change that they pay lip service to. Majorities strongly or somewhat agreed that women can work outside the home without sacrificing quality of childcare, that both parents should have equal childcare responsibilities, that women's job opportunities should be the same as men's, and that discrimination against women has hindered their success in general.

It is possible that a tendency to give a socially desirable answer influenced responses somewhat, resulting in answers more positive than they actually may be. However, if favoring an expanded role for women is considered the "socially desirable" answer, this reflects considerable social change when contrasted with attitudes of the past. Twenty years ago these kinds of responses would not have been the socially sanctioned ones.

On the other hand, parents revealed attitudes which were somewhat in conflict with each other -- a result which will not surprise many people who study attitudes. An example is parents' overwhelming endorsement of the view that "even if they do have families, women should be given opportunities equal to men to work and have careers outside their home." Support for this statement contrasts with parents' greater optimism about the financial futures of sons than daughters, as well as with beliefs that aggressiveness, competitiveness, independence, being well-informed, and deriving satisfaction

from work are more important traits for boys than for girls. This contrast also suggests that many parents have not give much thought to specific ways in which women's opportunities outside the home can be increased.

The results of this study are interesting to compare to some of the results of the Minnesota Youth Poll[4] which took place at about the same time (Hedin, Erickson, Simon, and Walker, 1984). The poll found boys and girls tending to agree that families treat children differently, based on sex differences, and they were less likely to perceive differential treatment in the schools. They perceived that families allow boys greater freedom and assign tasks around the home according to sex stereotypes. They thought that girls are both overprotected from life's problems and pampered.

Almost all the teenagers interviewed thought differential treatment affected their future aspirations and goals, their personalities, and their attitudes about the world of work. In general, they saw the cumulative impact of these forces as negative for girls and positive for boys.

The strength of the relationships among parents' sex, children's sex, and parents' education indicates that attitude change toward sex roles is related to economic conditions which foster widespread opportunity for education. The interrelationship among these three variables suggests that social change in attitudes toward sex roles involves a very complex process. They show that equal opportunity begins in the home, and they reveal difficulties inherent in aspiring to goals which are more easily achieved by the advantaged than the disadvantaged.

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NOTES

1. The authors point out that parents' attitudes are sometimes related to children's choices of friends.

2. Dayton's department store, the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota, and Spring Hill Center sponsored the conference, a symposium on "The Economic Future of Girls and Young Women" on May 22-23, 1984, at Spring Hill Center in Wayzata, Minnesota. The audience included service providers, funders, educators, and representatives of business, government, labor, and women's organizations, among others concerned with these issues.

3. About 75% of parents were able to predict a potential occupation for their children. Age of child was somewhat related to ability to name a future career. A majority (63%) of parents of youngsters aged 10 to 12 could do so. Eighty-five percent of parents with children aged 13 to 14 and 76% of parents with children aged 15 to 19 made predictions.

The younger the child, the greater the likelihood that high-status white-collar occupations were named -- 87% of parents with offspring aged 10-12 gave this kind of response, compared to 79% of those with children aged 13-14 and 69% of those with children aged 15-19. This suggests that as the child gets closer to the time when she or he will actually enter or prepare for an occupation, a "reality factor" of limitations to ability and resources develops in parents' minds.

Age of children had no bearing on parents' evaluations of children's future job and their own jobs, nor was it related to their reasons for saying the job would be better, the same, or worse than their occupations.

4. The Minnesota Youth Poll is an ongoing project. The 1984 poll included material for presentation to the same conference as was the survey of parents' attitudes. The poll used a purposive sample of 725 high school students (aged 14 to 18) who participated in 115 discussion groups, representing a range of geographic areas, including urban, suburban, and rural schools, as well as one adolescent treatment center. Questionnaires were administered during a class, and a second questionnaire was administered to self-selected discussion groups of 4-6 people.

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Table 1. Parents' Attitudes Toward Importance of School Subjects

QUESTION: Now, I'm going to name some subjects that are taught in school. For each one, I'd like you to tell me how important you think it is for your son/daughter to learn that subject before he/she is out of school.

Parents Who Say the School Subject Is Extremely or Very Important

	Fathers Discussing Daughters (N = 101)	Fathers Discussing Sons (N = 101)	Mothers Discussing Daughters (N = 102)	Mothers Discussing Sons (N = 101)	Total (N = 405)
Advanced math, such as algebra, geometry, and calculus	57%	75%	60%	80%	68%[c]
Social studies, government, and public affairs	65	59	67	76	67[a]
How to type	31	29	50	42	38[b]
How to speak in front of a group	66	78	72	73	72
Basic scientific findfings about the workings of the universe	29	42	33	40	36
Advanced science, such as chemistry and physics	33	47	25	45	37[b]
Family life, parenting, and sex education classes	67	67	74	73	71
Courses to learn an occupation or trade	54	66	66	71	64[a]
Courses on business skills (e.g., accounting or bookkeeping)	43	53	52	49	49

[a] $p < .10$.

[b] $p < .01$.

[c] $p < .001$.

Table 2. Parents' Attitudes Toward Importance of Personal Characteristics and Job Attributes

QUESTION: Now, I'm going to read a list of words and phrases that are sometimes used to describe people, and I'd like you to tell me how important each one is for your son/daughter to grow up to be a normal, healthy adult.

Parents Who Say the Characteristic Is Extremely or Very Important

	Fathers Discussing Daughters (N = 101)	Fathers Discussing Sons (N = 101)	Mothers Discussing Daughters (N = 102)	Mothers Discussing Sons (N = 101)	Total (N = 405)
Being aggressive	32%	45%	33%	29%	35%[a]
Paying attention to his/her Appearance	74	69	85	80	77[b]
Being well-informed about political and social issues	47	48	51	60	51
Being competitive	49	56	32	53	48[c]

QUESTION: Now, I'm going to name some things about people's jobs. For each, I'd like you to tell me how important you think it will be for your son's/daughter's future job.

Parents Who Say the Characteristic Is Extremely or Very Important

	Fathers Discussing Daughters (N = 101)	Fathers Discussing Sons (N = 101)	Mothers Discussing Daughters (N = 102)	Mothers Discussing Sons (N = 101)	Total (N = 405)
High income	28%	39%	45%	49%	41%[b]
No danger of being fired	29	43	45	50	42[b]
No danger of being physically injured	62	46	69	64	60[a]

[a] $P < .10$.

[b] $P < .05$.

[c] $P < .01$.

Table 3. Parents' Ratings of Importance of Family Life and Work

Those Saying:	Fathers Discussing Daughters (N = 101)	Fathers Discussing Sons (N = 101)	Mothers Discussing Daughters (N = 102)	Mothers Discussing Sons (N = 101)	Total (N = 405)
QUESTION: How important do you think it is that your son/daughter be trained for a job that will in adult life allow him/her to support himself/herself and a family?					
Extremely or very important	83%	90%	96%	93%	91%[a]
QUESTION: Which of these things do you think will be the more important to your son's/daughter's future happiness as an adult?					
Home and family life	66	77	75	67	71
A feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction with work	34	23	25	33	29
QUESTION: Which do you think will be more important to your son's/daughter's future financial security?					
Finding the right person to marry	33	24	27	20	26
Choosing the right job or career	67	76	73	80	74
QUESTION: Now, thinking about your children when they get to be your age -- would you say they will be better off financially than you are, about the same, or not as well off?					
Better off	23	42	31	39	34[b]
The same	49	41	42	48	45
Not as well off	28	17	26	14	21

[a] $p < .01$.

[b] $p < .05$.

Table 4. Parents' Reasons for Saying Children's Predicted Job Will Be Better, the Same, or Worse than Their Own Jobs.

	Parents Who Have a Prediction			
	Employed Mothers	Homemakers	Total Women	Total Men
Those Who Say "Better":	(N = 105)	(N = 55)	(N = 160)	(N = 202)
Child's choice requires more education, training, skills; has more opportunities for advancement; has higher prestige.	18%	25%	20%	20%[a]
Child will earn more, have better financial benefits.	23	13	22	18
Child's choice will be more fulfilling; child will have more career options than parent; parent has a low-level job or doesn't have a paid job.	16	28	18	8
Other reasons.	0	4	1	2
Those Who Say Same:				
Child's choice requires similar training, education, skills, opportunities for advancement, prestige.	29	11	25	26
Although child's choice is different from parent's, the two jobs are equally fulfilling.	7	15	9	11
Other reasons.	2	2	2	2
Those Who Say Worse:				
Child's choice pays poorly, allows little advancement, involves poor working conditions; is an over-crowded field; child has more ability than job requires.	4	2	3	14

a Percentages are based on number of responses which parents gave. That is, for example, that 18% of employed women's responses concerned more education, training, skills, etc., than their own jobs, compared with 25% of homemakers' responses in this category.

Table 5. Parents' Education

	Men (N = 202)	Women (N = 203)	Total (N = 405)
High school or less	34%	45%	40%
Some college/vo tech	29	36	32
College degree or more	37	20	28

$\underline{X}^2 = 15.28$, $\underline{df} = 2$, $\underline{p} < .005$, $\underline{V} = .19$

	Women Who Work Outside the Home (N = 134)	Women Who Do Not Work Outside Home (N = 69)	Total Women (N = 203)
High school or less	43%	48%	45%
Some college/vo tech	33	42	36
College degree or more	24	11	20

$\underline{X}^2 = 5.32$, $\underline{df} = 2$, n.s., $\underline{V} = .16$

Table 6. Women's Social Attitudes by Employment Status

Mother Who Strongly or Somewhat Agree with the Following Statements:

	Women Working Outside Home (N = 134)	Women Not Working Outside Home (N = 69)	Total Women (N = 203)
A woman can work outside the home even if she has small children and still be a good mother.	88%	69%	82%[a]
It's more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself.	30	56	39[b]
Women are expected to be able to do too much these days. Having a good job and being a good mother at the same time takes too much out of a person.	61	72	65
People in this country need to return to more traditional standards of family life and parental responsibility.	78	96	84[a]

SUBSAMPLE: Mothers who could predict a future job for their children:

QUESTION: Would you consider that job or career (child's predicted choice) a better job than the one you have, about the same, or worse?

	Women Working Outside Home (N = 105)	Women Not Working Outside Home (N = 55)	Total Women (N = 160)
Better	54%	62%	57%
About the same	42	37	40
Worse	4	2	3

[a] $p < .05$

[b] $p < .005$

Table 7. Parents' Attitudes by Education and Sex

School Subjects	Level of Education	Men (N = 202)	Women (N = 203)	Total (N = 405)
		Those Who Say Extremely or Very Important		
More advanced math such as algebra, geometry, and calculus	Low	63%	69%	66%[c]
	Medium	64%	64%	64%
	High	70%	85%	76%
Advanced science, such as chemistry and physics	Low	39%	30%	34%[c]
	Medium	31%	29%	30%
	High	47%	58%	50%
Courses to learn an occupation or trade	Low	74%	84%	80%[c]
	Medium	64%	59%	61%
	High	43%	53%	46%
Personal Characteristics				
Being aggressive	Low	53%	39%	45%[c]
	Medium	40%	29%	34%
	High	24%	15%	21%
Being well-informed about political and social issues.	Low	46%	56%	52%[b]
	Medium	45%	53%	50%
	High	49%	63%	54%

a "Low education" means high school degree or less (N = 159), "medium education" means some college or vo-tech (N = 131), and "high education" means college degree or more education (N = 115).

b $p < .05$.

c $p < .001$.